

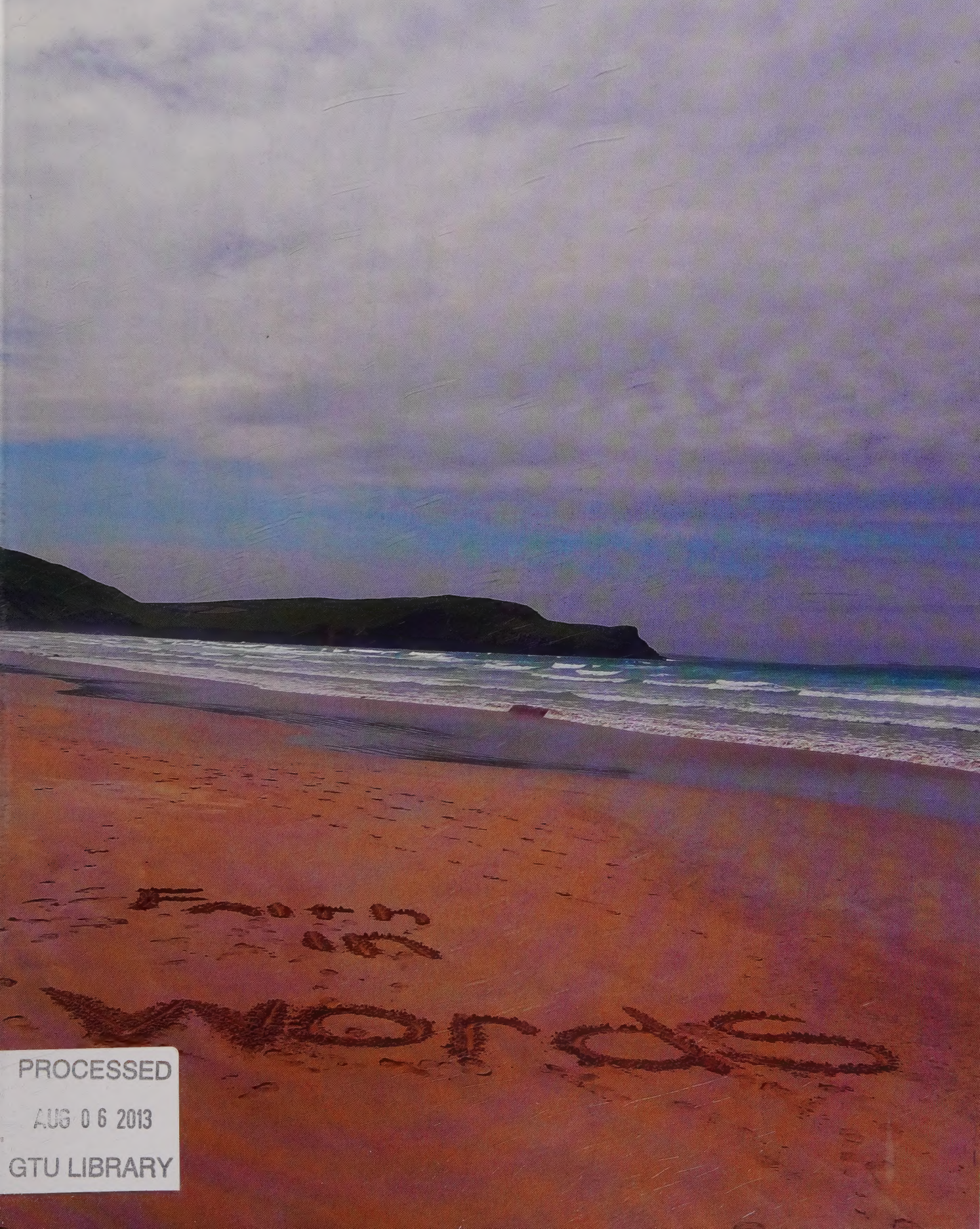


The INQUIRER

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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'The People Praising', a sculpture by Elizabeth Mulchinek which hangs in the worship area at Bury Unitarian Church.

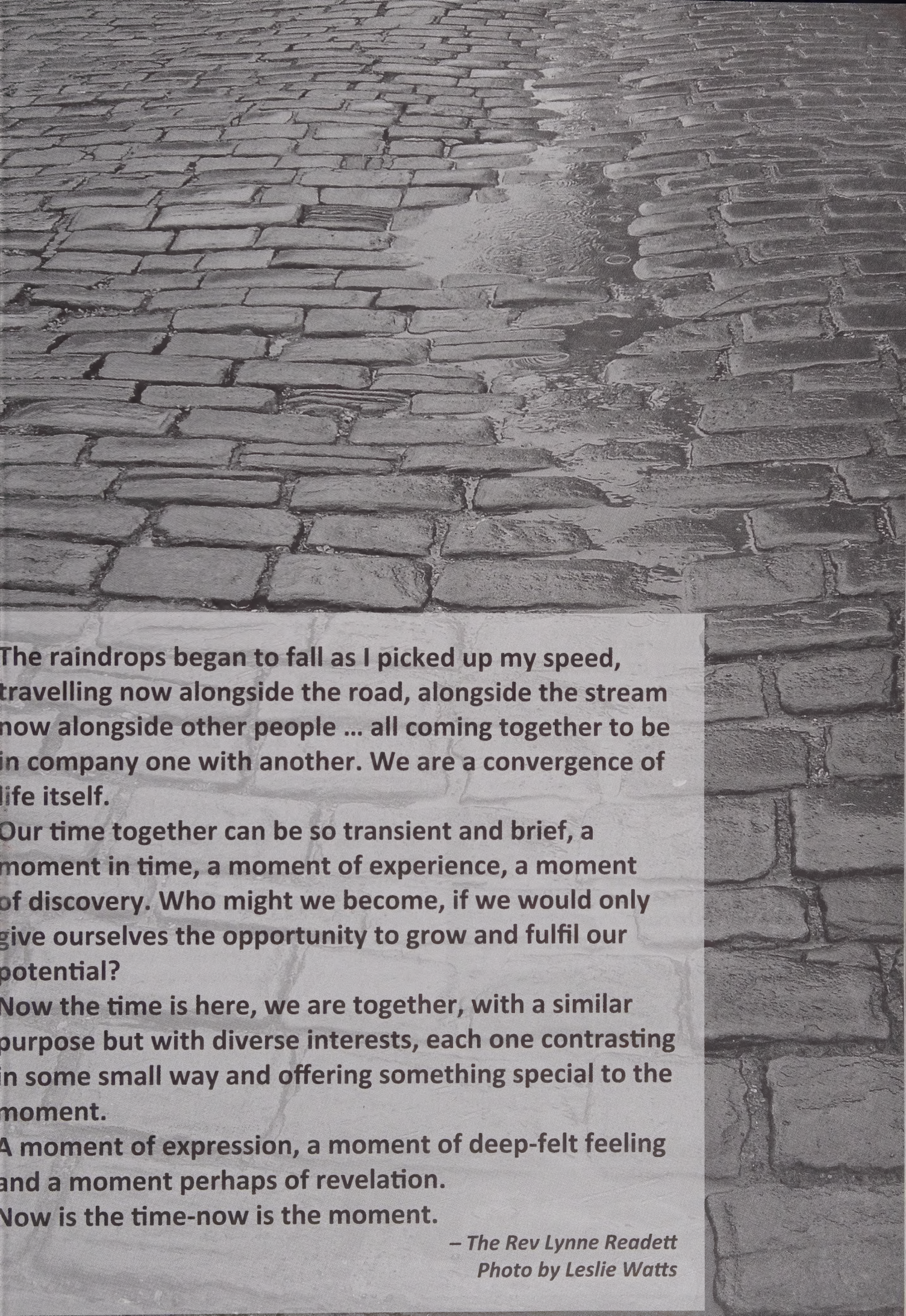
Inquiring Words

Let us pray to the God who holds us in the hollow of his hands – to the God who holds us in the curve of her arms – to the God whose flesh is the flesh of hills and hummingbirds and angleworms – whose skin is the colour of an old black woman and a young white man, and the colour of the leopard and the grizzly bear and the green grass snake – whose hair is like the aurora borealis, rainbows, nebulae, waterfalls, and a spider's web – whose eyes sometime shine like the evening star, and then like fireflies, and then again like an open wound – whose touch is both the touch of life and the touch of death – and whose name is everyone's, but mostly mine. And what shall we pray? Let us say, "Thank you."

– Max Coots

With thanks

This colour edition was sponsored by Bury Unitarian Church, in celebration of a very successful Reunion Sunday. See a story and photos on page 15. Following this double edition, The Inquirer will skip an issue, with the next one to appear on 31 August.

A black and white photograph of a cobblestone street. A puddle in the center of the frame reflects light, creating a bright, shimmering area. The cobblestones are arranged in a regular pattern, and the overall tone is somber and reflective.

The raindrops began to fall as I picked up my speed,
travelling now alongside the road, alongside the stream
now alongside other people ... all coming together to be
in company one with another. We are a convergence of
life itself.

Our time together can be so transient and brief, a
moment in time, a moment of experience, a moment
of discovery. Who might we become, if we would only
give ourselves the opportunity to grow and fulfil our
potential?

Now the time is here, we are together, with a similar
purpose but with diverse interests, each one contrasting
in some small way and offering something special to the
moment.

A moment of expression, a moment of deep-felt feeling
and a moment perhaps of revelation.

Now is the time-now is the moment.

— *The Rev Lynne Readett*
Photo by Leslie Watts

Chalice Words – for when the matches are forgotten

To cut out and be kept with the Chalice, for emergencies

Our Chalice remains unlit,

A reminder that light and warmth are fragile.

We cannot expect light to enter our lives without thought

We do not feel warmth from single flame

An unlit chalice shows the promise that exists in each of us,

The promise of the future



– The Rev Daniel Costley

In a French village (near Mirepoix)

At a stone cross by a medieval church,
In the fields are sunflowers,
Lizards and blue butterflies.
The stillness is broken by cars on the
highway.

Now, a few moments of tranquillity
with a gentle breeze.
Look at the ancient stones.
Be at ease.

Forgive yourself those ancient stones
that have not yet passed from your life.
Live with compassion today
for yourself and others.

– Richard Boeke

Prayer

Let me pray for someone else. Someone who is
known to me. Think of them, send them blessings,
empathise with the challenges and struggles of their
lives, celebrate their successes. Pray that what they
wish for may bring them the rewards they expect.

Bring them into the circle of people I pray for.

Let me pray for that person I do not know, that
no one seems to know, who suffers the trials of life
alone and is often swamped by them. Give them a
place in the circle of people I pray for.

Let me pray for myself, that I can focus on the
needs of others without thinking how it affects my
life, may I not try to manage their lives as if they
were my own.

May the circle of people I pray for always be
full and my prayer put love and energy into it. And
may I be grateful for the source of my own well being.

– Tony McNeille

Oh God, our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this opportunity of meeting together again in this hallowed place of prayer. We thank Thee for Thy blessings, especially for the labour and generosity of those who have gone before and left us this church with all its beauty and its record of service to Thee in past generations. Help us to be worthy of our heritage and united in our endeavours to carry on Thy work here. Grant us the wisdom to know what is Thy will, and the faith and courage to do our part for the advancement of Thy Kingdom and the Glory of Thy Name.

Amen

– David E Gillman

The word is Ubuntu: I am because you are



Children gather in Khayelitsha Township. Photo by Michael von Aichberger

By Lizette Robbins

Khayelitsha is a township area about 20 km outside of central Cape Town. The name means New Home. Hundreds of thousands of residents, almost exclusively black, who poured into the Western Cape over the years to seek a better life, settled in that area. It was all they could afford, within (or maybe without!) access to work in the city.

The area has spread enormously. A fraction of the residences can be seen from one of the main roads entering the city. It is a curious mix of houses and shacks, crowded together to maximise plot space. The brick built homes are small and simple in design. The shack areas are vulnerable to flooding in winter and built so close to each other that fires, from accidents involving rudimentary heating or cooking methods, spread shockingly fast, with frequent and enormous loss, trauma and death.

And yet, through all of that, it felt to me like a community, a dichotomous, maybe even schizophrenic, community. But I am running ahead of myself ...

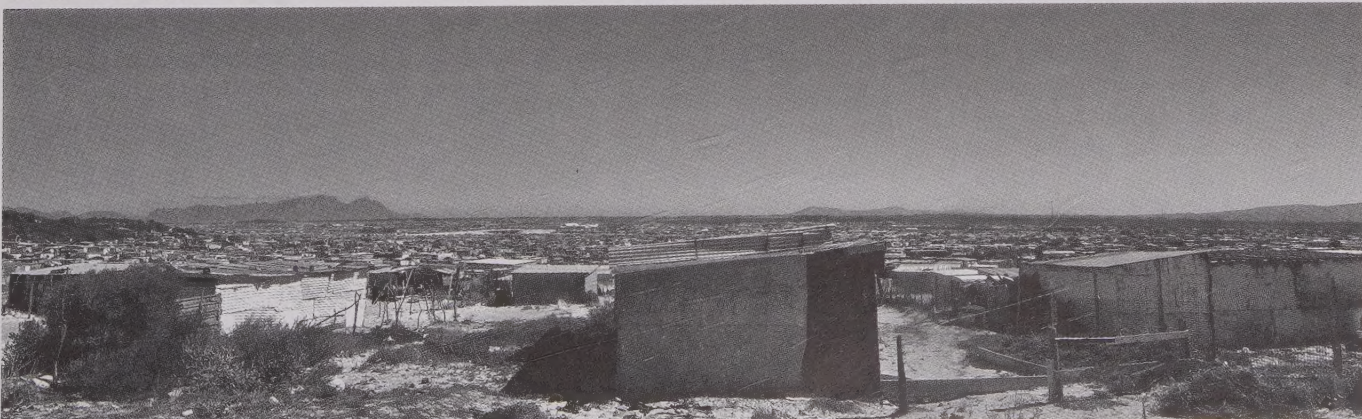
I spent four years working within various areas like this one as the Nursing Sister at a nutritional project called *Philani*. The aim of this non-governmental organisation was for staff, trained and resident in those areas, to tackle child malnutrition. The children were referred to us by hospitals, clinics, or sometimes neighbours. We would monitor them until they were stable, but also offer the mothers an opportunity to learn skills and generate an income for their homes and families, thus avoiding the danger of our work becoming merely superficial, 'band aid' endeavours.

Khayelitsha had, and still has no room for predictability or complacency. One never really knew what was around the next bend. The challenge of working or even just surviving in that community involved accepting that yesterday's passable road would be an impassable one today; yesterday's smile could be today's scowl; yesterday's pet, today's meal; yesterday's infant, today's statistic.

And yet, a never ending vibrancy and dance of light and darkness, tears and laughter, joy and bewilderment was there. There was an unquenchable light of hope, seen most powerfully in the eyes of the mothers who attended the clinics; hope and relief at respite for a few hours from home, its demands and austerity; gratitude for some sustenance; and a glimpse at the mere possibility of healing of their beloved offspring.

The Xhosa folk have an expression, 'Ubuntu'. Loosely translated it means, 'I am, because you are'. Our team often witnessed magnanimous sharing, not only at the frequent times of acute need or loss, but on a daily basis. Life lessons, indeed. It often takes other peoples' stories and perspectives to enable us see our own more clearly. Even in the bleakest hour of darkness, the light of hope did not go out, and for that we gave thanks. For that experience I still give thanks, as I recognise that through those years my soul was ministered to. In those desperately poor areas, we experienced Ubuntu, the mysterious exchange of energy between the giver and the receiver, one that frees us to see each other as equals in the sacred circle of life.

Lizette Robbins is a member of Cape Town Unitarian Church.



Khayelitsha is vast. Photo by KennyOMG, via Wikimedia Commons

Unitarians helped create justice

By Derek McAuley

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 received the Royal Assent on 17 July, following extensive debate in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It has been a bit of a roller-coaster for supporters of the Bill over recent months. However, Unitarians can truly celebrate now that the legislation has been passed. This is an historic step towards the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in society.

Unitarians began this journey in April 2008 when our General Assembly supported the right to hold civil partnership ceremonies in places of worship. At the time it seemed so radical and unachievable. To move so quickly to same-sex marriage in church and in civil settings is a remarkable step.

We would congratulate members of all political parties in both Houses of Parliament who have steadfastly supported equal marriage. To our opponents I say that your fears will be found groundless.

We are pleased that Parliament accepted our arguments that those faith groups who wished to host same sex marriages should be able to do so. This was, of course, not in the original consultation paper yet the Government responded to our sincerely held views.

Same-sex marriage has been controversial. However, with our friends in the Quakers, Liberal and Reform Judaism and in other faith groups, we have prevented this from becoming a 'culture war' between faith and secular society. There is clear support for same-sex marriage across people of many faiths and none.

The Act, which applies to England and Wales, will:

- Enable same sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies;
- Ensure those religious organisations which wish to do so can opt in to marry same-sex couples according to their rites;
- Protect religious organisations and their representatives from successful legal challenge if they do not wish to marry same-sex couples;
- Enable civil partners to convert their partnership to a marriage, if they wish;
- Enable individuals to change their legal gender without having to end their marriage;
- Require a review (including full public consultation) on whether to enable celebrant-based authorisation of marriages by belief organisations, to be published before 1 January 2015;
- Require a review (including full public consultation) of the operation and future of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 in England and Wales, to start as soon as practicable, and with a report on the outcome to be published;
- Require a review of current survivor benefits of occupational pension schemes (including consultation) with a

report on the outcome to be published before 1 July 2014.

Of course, passing a law is only the first but very important step. There is a lot of work going on to enable the first same sex marriages to take place by summer 2014. I am in contact with the Government Equalities Office on the arrangements.

In autumn I expect regulations to be published setting out the detailed procedures to implement the law. These will be followed by detailed guidance from the Registrar General. Only then will churches and chapels be able to apply for approval of their buildings for registration for same-sex marriages and to appoint authorised persons to carry out same-sex marriages. Churches will have to 'opt-in' by these two steps. Current provision for marriages does not automatically give churches the right to conduct same-sex marriages.

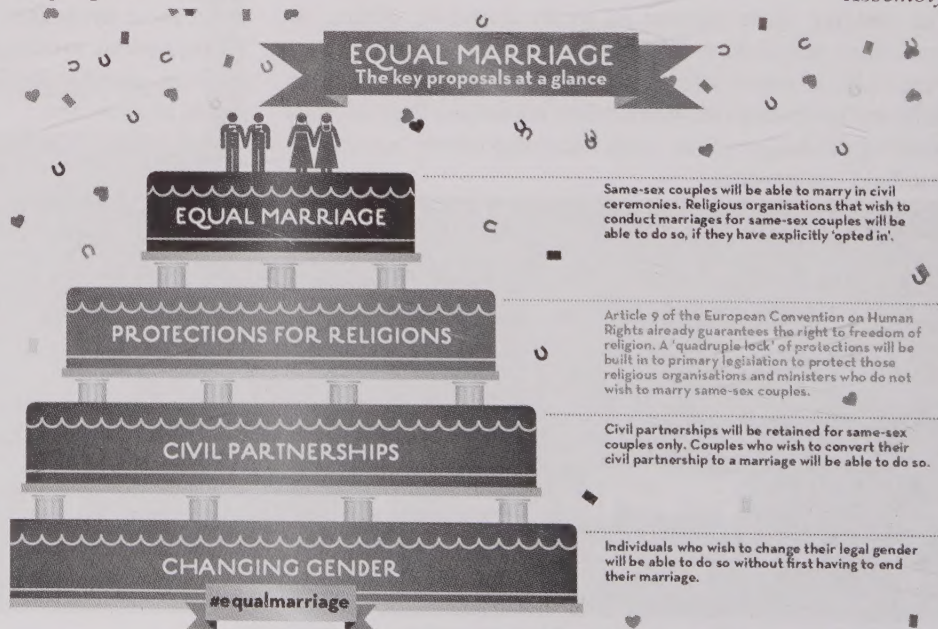
I shall be liaising with the Government Equalities Office to ensure that workable arrangements are in place that meet our needs and shall keep congregations updated on progress over the coming months. We shall also be participating in the reviews that have been initiated.

But let us not under-estimate what has been achieved. Margaret Mead wrote: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'

Theodore Parker the Unitarian minister and prominent American Transcendentalist, called for the abolition of slavery. In 1857 a collection of 'Ten Sermons of Religion' by Parker was published and the third sermon titled 'Of Justice and the Conscience' included figurative language about the arc of the moral universe: 'Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.'

By our actions, with our friends in other faith and non-faith bodies, I truly believe that we have bent the moral universe towards justice.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.



Uh-oh, Doris is on the road again

Dear Pulpit Secretaries:

You are going to invite me to take a service. Good. I'll be glad to come but...

Have you sent me directions? My instructions via Google/AA/sat-nav take me off the B1234 into Agatha and then right into Daisy which is hopeless on a Sunday because of the Methodists reversing out of their tiny little car park and the Baptists reversing into theirs. Much better to turn off at the traffic lights by the Co-op into Ermintrude, take a left into Alice and then right into Marjorie and then left into Daisy.

Have you told me about parking or will I have to circle the streets endlessly until I find a space? If there is a Pay and Display it would be useful to know how much it costs.

Have you told me of any expectations of the congregation? Do you always finish by singing verse three of Hymn 94? I need to know – and do you stand up for this? Do you always say (or sing) the Lord's Prayer/the Prayer of Jesus and which nomenclature do you use? Would Mrs B have a fit if we said a different version?

Have you checked the hymns I sent you to make sure that the congregation knows them? I have been known to say "They'll just have to learn it then" but it is as well to know. Do you prefer a different tune to the one in the book? Please let me know or I'll be merrily singing 'Gerontius' while you all sing 'Nun danket all'.

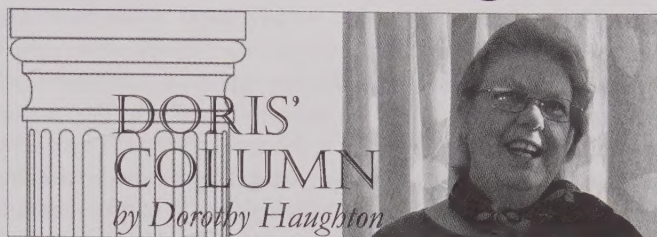
Is there an offertory or a retiring collection? If there is an offertory is that what you call it? Do you want me to receive it? Would you like me to say something about it?

When do you want the notices? NB: You can't have them after the address because I don't always do an address so could we have them at the beginning or the end, please?

Do you like a musical interlude/a period of silence/a children's story?

How many people in the congregation are prepared to do a reading? I shall arrive and start pestering people, some of whom will be too embarrassed to refuse. I'll do some or all the readings if necessary but I do like people to participate whenever possible.

I'd be really grateful if you would check the loo to make



sure there is loo paper, soap, a towel. I have driven a long way.

Oh, and check there are enough matches for the chalice lighting, please? Or don't you do that? By the way, do you like Candles of Joy and Concern? Every other week, now and then, the last Sunday in the month?

Are you going to introduce me or shall I do that or does the congregation already know who I am?

I'd be eternally grateful also for any feedback from the congregation, even complaint. How am I supposed to get better at this if you say nothing? I have spent a lot of time and effort on this. I have delivered this service in the hope that you will find something of interest/use. If you didn't understand something, please, tell me. If you liked something, tell me and tell me why. If you didn't, then ditto.

Oh, and could you warn them that I might ask them something: their favourite colour/hymn/quiet place? It is so depressing to ask a question and have everyone look down at their hymnbook. This service is for us. It is not me standing aloft in the pulpit dropping (as we used to say in my teaching days) my artificial pearls before real swine. We are in this together. Which is why I like people who are willing to read or lead a prayer. If you have a musician or singer, let me know. I'd love to include them. If it's someone's birthday, could we all sing HBTY?

How would the congregation react if after 40 minutes or so I invited them all to come and sit in the front pews (I don't expect them to sit next to each other, that would be going too far) and discuss the theme of the service? With me, with each other.

I could go on and on. But I won't. I'll shut up now.

Dorothy Haughton is a worship leader in the Midlands.

Series filmed in Unitarian chapel continues

Michael Dadson wrote in to alert Unitarians that 'The Mill', a Channel 4 drama partly filmed in King Edward Street Unitarian Chapel, Macclesfield, continues on Sunday 4 August on Channel 4. The first episode aired on 28 July. The four-part series looks at the campaign to abolish slavery and child labour in the North West in the late 1800's

Channel 4 describes 'The Mill' as a historical drama written by John Fay set in rural-industrial England in the turbulent year of 1833.

Based on the extensive historical archive of Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire, this new serial depicts Britain at a time when the industrial revolution is changing the country beyond recognition. In the 1830s, children as young as nine work 12-hour shifts in the mills, and the new class of mill-owning families prosper. But the so-called "white slaves of England" are about to take their lives into their own hands for the first time as outsiders with new ideas enter their world. At Quarry Bank Mill things are about to change. Photo courtesy of Channel 4.



Embracing Edward Carpenter, pro

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself'

By Stephen Lingwood

Imagine yourself in a vast museum or art gallery in the pitch-black dead of night. You have one torch which shines a narrow beam of light. You can view objects and images, but only by shining your light at them, one at a time.

Now imagine each picture in the gallery shows an experience of your life. Your first day at school, your first kiss, your wedding day, the birth of your children, or the thousand million other individual moments that make up your life.

Which picture truly represents who *you* are? Which experience defines *you*? Or, do all of the images, all of the experiences, make up who you are? Or is the true 'you' the one who carries the torch and gazes on the experiences from another level of existence?

This idea is used by Bhagavan Das (1869-1958), the Indian member of the Theosophical Society, and is quoted by Edward Carpenter in his book *The Drama of Love and Death* (page 272).

Edward Carpenter's (1844-1929) birthday falls on 29 August. And I want to explore the experiences and ideas that made up *his* life. He might help us approach that great question, 'Who am I?'

I started investigating Edward Carpenter for the simple reason that his name is on the front of Bank Street Unitarian Chapel Bolton. There is a plaque outside our front door which states: 'This Chapel and its school served as a meeting place of the Bolton followers of Walt Whitman known as the "Eagle Street College" their wider circle included the writer Edward Carpenter (1844 – 1929)'

Eagle Street College, tongue-in-cheek

We have grown accustomed in our Chapel to celebrating Walt Whitman once a year, near his birthday in May, resurrecting those Bolton followers who met more than 100 years ago. As the plaque says they were known as 'Eagle Street College' which was a bit tongue-in-cheek, because the 'Eagle Street College' was just a small terraced house where one of the members, James William Wallace, lived with his mother. But it was in this place that a small group of men (and later women) began to meet in the 1880s to discuss literature, politics, spirituality and lots of other stuff. They met in several other places in and around Bolton including Bank Street Chapel and Rivington Unitarian Chapel.

Love's Vision

At night in each other's arms,
Content, overjoyed, resting deep deep down in the
darkness,
Lo! the heavens opened and He appeared –
Whom no mortal eye may see,
Whom no eye clouded with Care,
Whom none who seeks after this or that, whom none who
has not escaped from self.

There – in the region of Equality, in the world of Freedom no
longer limited,
Standing as a lofty peak in heaven above the clouds,
From below hidden, yet to all who pass into that region most
clearly visible –
He the Eternal appeared.

– Edward Carpenter

The group became more centred on the works of the American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1891), which in some ways they took as a kind of a religious scripture. They wrote to Whitman, and he wrote back, and they became connected to a trans-Atlantic network of religious and political radicals, including many of the earliest influential socialists.

But I was curious to find out, who was this Edward Carpenter, who was part of this radical network. Other than being a 'writer' who was he? I didn't know anything about him, but I felt should as his name was on the side of my Chapel.

Edward Carpenter was born in 1844 into an upper-middle-class family in Brighton. But even as a young boy he was rather different. He was very uncomfortable with his Brighton middle-class respectability. He went to Cambridge University and studied mathematics, although he was interested in many subjects: scientific, spiritual, political, art. He became a fellow of the University, which in those days meant he had to be ordained into the Church of England. He rather liked the idea of a quiet life of academia in Cambridge, but it was not to be.

A friend handed him a copy of Walt Whitman's poems. Carpenter lay on the floor in his room poring over the book in wonder. The casual free-wheeling style of Whitman at first seemed strange to Carpenter. But it was also liberating: Whitman's poetry was wild, earthy and unashamedly celebrated the body and the beauty of both men and women.

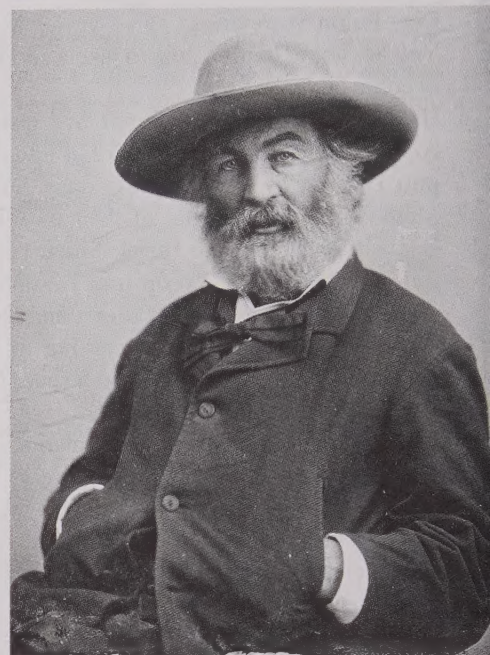
Whitman nudged Carpenter to embrace at least two inclinations he had been wrestling with: one was a democratic vision of a society that crossed the class divides; the other was the acceptance of homosexuality, as something not to be ashamed of, but something to embrace and celebrate.

From Cambridge to Yorkshire culture shock

Whitman's poetry seemed to have this profound effect on many people – the men and women in Bolton who began to meet and read poetry and discuss all the issues it brought up and Edward Carpenter.

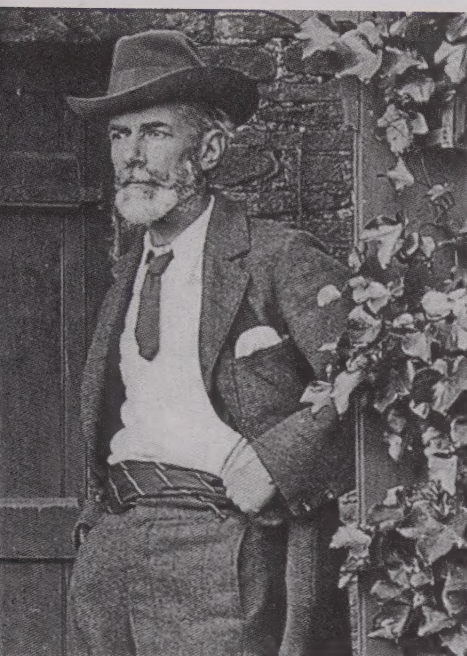
His belief in socialism led him to resign from Cambridge, to write poetry himself and join the University Extension programme, which offered lectures in northern towns to people of all classes. Carpenter suddenly found himself in Yorkshire and there was a bit of culture shock. He lectured, he joined socialist movements and he tried to live out his ideals. He eventually settled in a small cottage outside Sheffield where he strove for a rustic ideal of the simple life – like the sitcom 'The Good Life' – growing his own food and looking after the land.

Edward Carpenter was a prolific writer and perhaps his best known work is for his poem 'Towards Democracy', in the style of Whitman,



Walt Whitman, US National Archives photo

t of soul and body, and all our selves



Edward Carpenter photo by James Steakley
[Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

his book *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*. In that book he theorised, in many ways similar to Karl Marx, that civilisation not progress but essentially a disease we need to be cured of to go back to a simpler way of life, represented by communism or socialism.

Perhaps this seems extreme. But Carpenter knew people were more complex than theories, and he was never dogmatic in his ideas. He

and happily amongst socialist, communists, anarchists, and other progressives. But he never put himself exclusively in one camp. He was in touch with the Bolton Whitmanites, and they exchanged letters. They were very good friends with Carpenter and one of them was probably his lover. We don't know if he ever came to Bank Street Chapel, but it seems possible.

Unitarian ministers influenced Carpenter

Carpenter was not a Unitarian. Nevertheless he was deeply influenced by a couple of Unitarian ministers when he was in Leeds. He was influenced by Joseph Estlin Carpenter (no relation), who was one of the pioneers in bringing an interest in world religions into Unitarianism. He spent time with the American William Henry Channing, who introduced him to the Transcendentalists, a group of mainly Unitarian ministers who embraced nature and intuition.

Though Carpenter never became a Unitarian – if anything he was a pioneer – he was a pioneer in areas that have since influenced Unitarianism greatly. Indeed much of what has influenced Unitarianism (and society) since the 19th century is personified in Carpenter: feminism, gay rights, environmentalism, paganism, world religions, animal rights, vegetarianism. He was ahead of his time in all these areas: a pioneer of many progressive causes. He was no saint, though, and one of his moral failures was a persistent anti-Semitism. Nevertheless one minister called him a 'prophet of soul and body.'

For me that's the most significant thing about Carpenter. He embodied both body and soul. Our culture is so inclined to separate those things. We divide body and soul, feminine and masculine, religion and science, paganism and Christianity, homosexual and heterosexual. These are not just ideas: they are divisions within us. Each of us is divided within ourselves. Walking through that dark art gallery we see different parts of ourselves, different experiences and we ask, 'who are you amongst all this diversity?'

Perhaps it is the masks we wear – one for every situation. In the Bank Street Unitarian Chapel I am minister; with my friends, I'm a minister; with my family I'm a son, a brother, a brother-in-law, a nephew. However old I grow, I'll still be a child to my parents. Who are you? 'real' me?

Who is the 'real' you? You are different in church than you are when

you're at home, when you're with different groups of people, with family, with friends, with co-workers. That's always going to be true. But sometimes we divide ourselves and we lose any real sense of a coherent 'me.' As Walt Whitman wrote: 'Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)'

Each of us is large; each of us contains multitudes and contradictions. But some of these contradictions tear us apart. Think of the celibate male Christian leader, calling same-sex marriage an aberration, shameful, grotesque and likening it to slavery, and is then found out to have made inappropriate sexual advances towards men.

Confront hypocrisy with compassion

Our response should be compassion for someone who has so divided themselves, whose harmful contradictions fight against each other.

If our Christianity truly flowed from the teaching of Jesus, we would see hypocrisy as the greatest sin. It's the thing Jesus condemns most strongly. Our contradictions tear our souls apart. Jesus said, 'if new wine is put into old wineskins, the skins are destroyed, new wine has to be put into new wineskins.'

Jesus, and other spiritual teachers, promise we can be healed of our inner conflicts. Indeed this is the great task of the spiritual life: to make the inner like the outer, to integrate all the parts of ourselves into one.

I am a Unitarian because this faith teaches more fully than any other that we need every part of ourselves.

Your body, your sexual self, your sensual self, is not to be denied or repressed.

Your mind, your thinking, doubting self, is not to be denied or repressed.

Your soul, your yearning, feeling, praying self, is not to be denied or repressed.

Edward Carpenter, in coming to terms with himself as a homosexual, as a political campaigner, as a philosopher, as a lover, as a gardener, as a spiritual pagan, worked hard to embrace every part of who he was. Even though some parts of him were considered dangerous and shameful by his society. He didn't always succeed, but he kept up the work.

More than anything else, Carpenter sought to harmonise soul and body, the spiritual and the physical. In his early years, Carpenter was influenced by Plato, who valued the spiritual over the material. He wrote to a friend, 'you have two sides to your existence (everyone has I suppose in a way) – the one you live in Duke Street and digest law

(Continued on next page)

We Two Boys Together Clinging

We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going – North and South excursions making,
Power enjoying – elbows stretching – fingers clutching,
Arm'd and fearless – eating, drinking, sleeping, loving,
No law less than ourselves owning – sailing, soldiering,
thieving,
threatening,
Misers, menials, priests alarming – air breathing, water drinking, on
the turf or the sea-beach dancing,
Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking,
feebleness
chasing,
Fulfilling our foray.

– Walt Whitman

Integrating and caring for body and soul

(Continued from previous page)

and perform the usual functions of life... the other you spend in an ideal world... I have just been reading Plato's *Phaedrus* – that is the essence of what you dream of." (Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, 37)

But later in life he valued the sensual more, when he wrote:

"The kiss of the senses is beautiful beyond all and every abstraction; the touch of the sunlight, the glory of form and colour, the magic of sweet sound, the joy of human embraces, the passion of sex – all so much more perfect because they are, as it were, something divine made actual and realisable. In such a mood asceticism in any form seems the grossest impiety and folly, and the pursuit of the Unseen a mere abandonment of the world for its shadow." (Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, 217)

Walt Whitman put it succinctly when he said in 'Song of Myself', 'the scent of my armpits is purer than prayer.'

The spiritual life is not an escape from the physical life. The spiritual life invites us to live much deeper into our physical lives.

Carpenter approvingly quoted the Chinese Taoist Lau Tzu 'these two things, the spiritual and the physical, though we call them by different names, in their Origins are one and the same.' (Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, 273)

Pay closer attention to our bodies

One of the most significant spiritual practices we can take on is to pay closer attention to our bodies: to feel the cool air entering our lungs; to pay attention to the many sensations our bodies are experiencing. Often prayer becomes most powerful when it moves out of our minds into our bodies. Mindfulness meditation is paying attention to our bodies. Communion, eating bread and wine, is paying attention to our bodies.

Do not turn away from your body, or your mind, or your soul.

As you walk through the dark gallery, looking at all those images of your life, do not deny a single one. All of the experiences make up who you are; every part of you makes up who you are. That doesn't mean all your actions are healthy or right, or all your experiences are good. But every fundamental part of you is important: body, mind and soul. All of it makes up 'you.'

But as we go deeper to answer that question 'who am I?' we discover we cannot answer it in isolation. 'You' are made up of your relationship to the Universe, or to what we might call God.

This is the universal witness of all the mystics. Perhaps we're not wandering the dark gallery alone. Perhaps others also wander and shine their lights on the same experiences. Only the darkness deceives us into thinking we're isolated. In fact, we're connected, related, interconnected to everyone else and to everything else around us. Edward Carpenter called this the 'All Soul'. (*Drama of Love and Death* 272)

Because Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself' is actually the 'Song of All of Us'. Each just one part of a greater whole.

Who are you?

You are one part of a Soul that encompasses us all. You contain multitudes, and you are part of a multitude of souls that makes up the greater soul.



This plaque, on Bolton Bank Street Unitarian Church led Stephen Lingwood to learn more about Edward Carpenter. Photo by Stephen Lingwood

Edward Carpenter said, 'For a time, certainly we cling to our limited and tiny self-life and consciousness and deem that all good comes from the careful guarding of the same. But again there comes a time when the bounds of personality confine and chafe beyond endurance, when an immense rage sweeps us far out into the great ocean; when to save our lives we deliberately lose them... And the hour arrives when we look down on these local days, these self-limitations, as phases – phases of some vaster state of being. ... [Then] the body moves freely about the world; life ceases to be the 'obstacle race' ... which it mostly now is; and... the soul moves freely, because truly for the redeemed soul it is possible to feel that all things and creatures are friendly, all beings are part of itself.' (*Drama of Love and Death* 286-7)

Let us seek every day to understand ourselves as one part of that greater All Soul.

Stephen Lingwood is minister to Bank Street, Bolton Unitarians.

ANZUUA conference in October

The Auckland Unitarian Church is affiliated to the UK & Irish churches through membership of the Unitarian General Assembly. We are hosting the biennial conference of the Australian & New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association (ANZUUA) later this year. GA President Rev Bill Darlison, who was a very successful visiting minister with us for 3 months in 2011, will be our keynote speaker.

The theme of the conference is 'The free and responsible search for truth and meaning' (the 4th Unitarian Universalist principle), and is open to anyone who with Unitarian or UU sympathies who would like to attend. We would be delighted if any British Unitarians would like to join us. The dates are Saturday 26th-Monday 28th of October, 2013. The conference website is now open for registrations, at <http://anzuua2013.weebly.com/> Find out more: aucklandunitarian.org.nz, and our email address is auckland@unitarian.org.nz

– Karen Cleary

Film Review: Fight for Tibet continues



Daniel Costley

By Daniel Costley

Review: *When the Dragon Swallowed the Sun*

In 1933, in one of his final pronouncements, His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama, the religious leader of the Tibetan people, warned of an impending invasion of the country. He encouraged all to prepare and to resist. In 1949, the Chinese Army began its move to remove the power of the Tibetan government, its King and its religious leader, and took control of

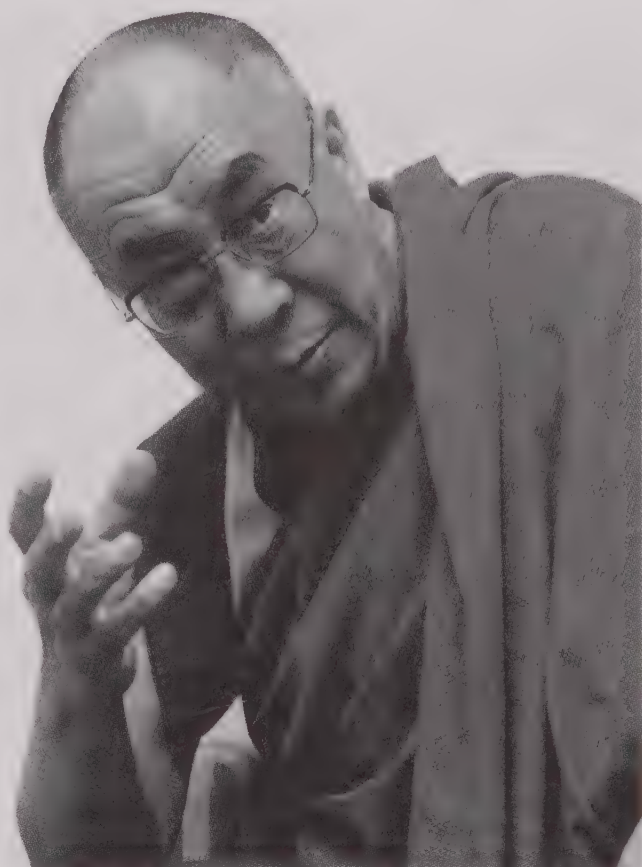
the country for China.

Dirk Simon's film begins with this short introduction to prepare the ground for a detailed review of the movement to remove Chinese rule from Tibet. It features interviews with many of the leading players of the movement, including the Prime Minister in exile, leaders of the Tibetan Students in Exile, the 18th Dharma King of Tibet and some remarkable interviews with those involved in the resistance in the early days of the struggle. There is also extensive coverage of the 14th Dalai Lama's efforts to secure a peaceful future. The film contains disturbing footage of clashes between Chinese forces and the Tibetan people.

Most interviews and footage in the film were shot on location in China, in the home of the exiled Tibetan community in Dharamshala, India, or around the Tibetan protests against China in San Francisco at the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics – although the beauty and mystery of the ancient kingdom of Tibet and its religious foundations are played to the full in dramatic and colourful footage of the country to a rich musical score, including original compositions from Philip Glass and Radiohead's Thom Yorke.

Yet this is not simply a film to set out the case to free Tibet from Chinese rule. More than that, it is a film that documents the frailties of a people in exile, and the changing face of a protest movement that appears increasingly out of touch with its historical roots. The interviews with various leaders of the exiled community display a range of positions on the aims and objectives of the freedom movement, from an uncompromising call for complete independence from representatives of Tibetan Students in Exile, to much less strident calls for acceptance and peace with the Chinese. The viewer is presented with a picture of passionate commitment to the cause, but one muddled with differing agendas led by a range of elected and unelected leaders, describing a confused picture of nature of true authority.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is the focus around which the film is built, and it is the unceasing adherence to his advice and teachings that make the largest impression. Having led the fight for independence for so long, it was his surprise call in 1988, in Strasbourg, to water down that fight to a case for 'constitutional autonomy' within the People's Republic of China that has sparked the greatest uncertainty. It is touching to see the reverence in which the Dalai Lama is held, although this sometimes conflicts with the concerns of those who feel



The Dalai Lama, photo by Martin Louis

the democratic will of the Tibetans is being overruled by unelected and tired leaders, including the Prime Minister in Exile.

This conflation of religious and democratic authorities brings a further dimension to the film. The Dalai Lama, and his currently proposed 'Middle Way' for Tibetan autonomy within China, talks constantly of the need for peace, dialogue and engagement; he recognises that China is too powerful to overcome in violent terms, and encourages a political solution. Those that remain unconvinced, and maintain the belief in outright independence often appear torn between the two causes. One interviewee refers to choosing between the teachings of His Holiness and the fight for independence as the equivalent of choosing between your mother and father – it's just not possible. There are many other references and footage of Tibetan religious festivals and ceremonies, including a spectacular visit by the teenage hereditary Dharma King to consult the Tibetan 'Nechung Oracle', the Kuten.

When the Dragon Swallowed the Sun is a beautifully produced film, setting out the contradictions that seem to engulf the Tibetan campaign against the People's Republic, and the viewer is left to decide for themselves whether the fight for independence, now running for over 50 years, has any chance of success. However, it is as a study of human behaviour in moral, ethical, political and religious decision-making, in the face of changing attitudes and political realities, that this film sets its highest standards.

When the Dragon Swallowed the Sun is in cinemas from 15 August. Directed by Dirk Simon. (Cert. 15)

The Reverend Daniel Costley is Minister to Sevenoaks Unitarians.

Say good bye to supernatural God

God Revised: How Religion Must Evolve in a Scientific Age
By Galen Guengerich

Book review by Kate Whyman

Galen Guengerich, who is Senior Minister at All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City, has launched into the 'God debate' with a new book that sets out to update our idea of the Almighty for a 21st century, scientific world. Forging a middle way between the new atheists and his own conservative Mennonite upbringing, he declares that a central premise of his book, and 'perhaps its most controversial and counterintuitive claim', is that 'God is not supernatural and yet belief in God is necessary'.

'Scientific evidence, he says, 'now demands that the idea of a supernatural God, like the idea of an Earth-centered universe, must be revised. It should rapidly be relegated to the category of archaic relics.'

His goal, he says, is to 'articulate an understanding of God that enables us to interpret our experience of the world and to account for its meaning without requiring us to make claims about God that contravene the laws of nature.' It's good to aim high.

Guengerich describes his book as a personal journey from 'Mennonite to Manhattan'. He describes 'almost suffocating' in the confines of the strict theological doctrine that characterised his childhood in Delaware; recalls his hankering for freedom and a way of life that would make sense in the modern world; and now finds himself raising his own daughter in 'perhaps as secular an environment as anywhere in the world'.

Along the way he has reassessed his idea of God, what religion means to him, and what place it has in the 21st century. The essence of this – put simply – is that God is the experience of being connected to everything past, present and future; that religion is about finding meaning and purpose in *this* life rather than salvation in the next; and that belonging to a religious community and living with an 'ethic of gratitude' is the way to achieve that. There you go; you don't need to read it now.

Except you do, because while this is familiar enough ground for most Unitarians, and will likely resonate with many, the author goes to considerable lengths to back up his proposition and sustain his argument. Although his style is mainly accessible and initially anecdotal, his ideas are also underpinned with a substantial amount of philosophy including, among others, Alfred North Whitehead and Friedrich Schleiermacher alongside the poetry of Walt Whitman. He attempts a new kind of proof for the existence of God, though this is a very different *kind* of God – one which

exists more in the way beauty exists than the way a person or a table exists.

There is much here in common with Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of 'inter-being', although Guengerich does not quote the Vietnamese Buddhist monk directly. For example, he asserts that the essence of an individual is the relationships we each represent and that, 'If teased all the way out in space and all the way back in time, these relationships ultimately include everything whatsoever'. We are, he says, quoting Whitehead, 'dependent on the universe for every detail of our experience'.

There's no doubt this is a very useful addition to the God debate, and I'm delighted to see it coming from a Unitarian minister, particularly one who has made the journey from a strictly doctrinal tradition and can articulate his personal odyssey with such clarity. I'd like to see more.

But my main problem with it is, paradoxically, that any attempt to redefine God is bound to be partial at best and at

worst is arguably just another – albeit liberal – doctrine. In the end I wondered whether his 'ethic of gratitude', while I basically agree with it, might inspire as much guilt as the concept of sin. What happens when we just can't quite manage to feel grateful for that bereavement, or bankruptcy or botched operation – not yet anyway?

And although I personally enjoy grappling with what God is and isn't, and therefore enjoy reading others' attempts to explain the inexplicable, they inevitably leave me feeling a bit disappointed and empty. 'Is that it?' is the question I'm left with. Can God really be summed up by a few well-chosen phrases and neat arguments? I doubt it.

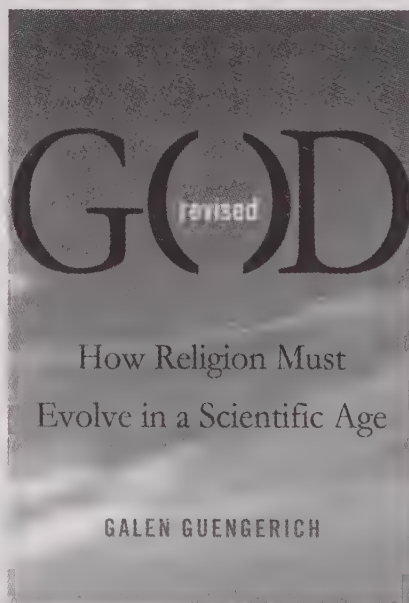
Of course 'God' is a human concept and our definitions tell us little about who or what he, she or it is and a great deal about who we are at this point in time. We create the God we need to make sense of our lives at the moment, and Guengerich is offering us his view of what today's God might look like or, more accurately, feel like – a version of God for our times. It's good and useful, as far as it goes.

But, like a fish trying to understand economics, we're wrestling with something several degrees of complexity beyond our capability.

I'm sure the author is well aware of this, but I would have liked him to acknowledge it, and leave a little more room for the ineffable mystery at which all we can really do is wave a finger – or a fin – in a vague but hopeful direction.

***God Revised: How Religion Must Evolve in a Scientific Age* ISBN: 0230342256**
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Kate Whyman is a Unitarian ministry student with a student pastorate at Ditchling. She is also a member of Lindsey Press Panel.



Galen Guengerich and his book *God Revised: How Religion must Evolve in a Scientific Age*.

Doncaster Unitarians celebrate Iftar

By Tom McReady

In July, Doncaster Unitarian and Free Christian Church hosted a special interfaith event – an Iftar – the ceremonial breaking of the daily Ramadan fast.

More than 30 people attended, with roughly equal numbers of Muslims and non-Muslims. We had readings from the Qur'an and the Gospels and prayers, readings and reflections from both traditions.

A special feature of the celebration was that seven people from Christian backgrounds; five Unitarians and two members of the United Reformed Church, joined Muslims from Doncaster and Sheffield in the Ramadan fast for that day and shared in the Iftar at half-past nine with a variety of Asian, African and British dishes.

I found it spiritually and culturally enriching to join in the fast; in fact the whole experience was fascinating. Reading books and listening to lectures may give you information about the history and philosophy of Islam but it does not give you understanding; or at least not as much as actually joining in the fast can do.

That applies not only in the sense of appreciating an Islamic perspective on hunger and self-discipline, but also in the simplest sense of being able to share with people who have done it so many times my feelings about cooking food without tasting it; of just trusting that it will turn out right.

I was aware of the deeper spiritual significance of fasting during Ramadan; that it is not simply about the self-discipline involved in abstaining from food and drink for a set period but also about deepening awareness of and strengthening sympathy with the poor and hungry of this world. But I did not foresee how profoundly that would affect me. For as I



Daniel Riyad-ul-Jannah Mohammed from Doncaster Mosque reciting from the Qur'an in Arabic at Doncaster Unitarian and Free Christian Church. Photo by Tom McReady

was cleaning up the remains of the evening a deep and clear conviction came upon me of exactly what a precious gift food is and how shameful it is to waste it or to take it for granted and I have decided therefore that I am going to keep the fast every Friday in Ramadan.

We have planned another 'Interfaith Iftar'. And I visited the Doncaster Mosque. The members of Doncaster Interfaith have also been invited to the Bait ul Aafiyat Mosque in Sheffield to join them in an Eid party to mark the end of Ramadan.

The Rev Tom McReady is minister with Doncaster Unitarians.

Connie Thompson: a well-lived life

Connie Thompson
1921 – 2013

By Celia Cartwright

There is something very special about a person who, though they have lived 91 years, still manages to fill a large chapel with friends and family who gather to celebrate their long life. Connie Thompson was special, and will remain special for all who knew and loved her. We gathered on 11 March at Nazareth Chapel, Padiham, to remember, to grieve, and to celebrate. We all had our stories to tell, of the kindness, grace and love we had received from this quietly spoken, unassuming, yet strong woman. The Rev Jean Bradley gently led the service and spoke of Connie's life, from her welcome birth, through her quiet, though eventful life, a life that never quite went into retirement.

Who would have guessed that only through her father's daily patient massaging of her feet did she ever walk; or that at the age of 6 she contracted and recovered from meningitis. What

did not surprise us was that she gained a scholarship to Accrington Grammar School, walking over three miles to and from the train station every day. Connie went on to become a gifted teacher, and even in retirement continued to guide young minds as a school volunteer and as a Sunday School teacher in Nazareth Unitarian Chapel, where she herself had learned.

I met Connie and her sister Joyce (the two seemed always inseparable) when I first attended a Lay Preacher's Association Conference in Lancashire, in the early 1990s where they were both keen members and of course, workers. Later I discovered the long years of service Connie had given to the Unitarian Women's League, at local, district and national levels, serving as its president in 1996, and during that year making connections with the Canadian Women's League, connections that remain to this day.

In 1997, when I arrived in Padiham to serve as a kind of locum minister,

it was Connie and Joyce who lovingly helped me settle in, giving me a bed and feeding me until I had unpacked at the manse, each day insisting I stop at half past five for tea, and an evening of companionship. I keep an image in my mind of Connie, it's my favourite, she is not in a pulpit or taking notes at a meeting, or delivering a report, or even teaching; she is standing in the kitchen in their home in Padiham, her pinny neatly tied, her cuffs protected by waterproof covers, and she is smiling, urging me to sit and rest. I suspect it's an image many of us have been privileged to share through the glorious years of her life, and an image that will keep us smiling, even through the pain of losing her.

Connie was a brave, gifted, noble, gracious, beautiful spirit; it was a spirit that still seemed present, even as her coffin was taken from the chapel.

Celia Cartwright is minister at Kendal.

Reply: Look at the quality of the science

By Geoffrey Levermore

It was good to see climate change as a topic in *The Inquirer* (6 July) but a disappointment in the poor quality of some of the comments in the article.

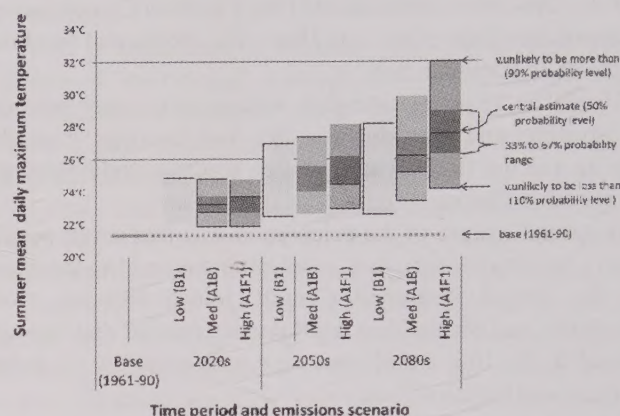
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO)) does not have a 'view' but assesses the current scientific literature of peer reviewed journal papers. Such papers are reviewed anonymously by a number of referees to ensure as far as is possible that the science is good. The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, published in 2007^{1,2}, is in three large volumes quoting many such references. The hundreds of assessors writing the report come from many countries in the world and there are even more reviewers to assess the drafts. There are summary reports so readers do not have to plough through the full three volumes. This Fourth Assessment Report also dealt with concerns over the 'hockey stick' curve. The latest report from the IPCC is expected shortly. But the emphasis must be that the scientific method is applied and that comments and views are secondary.

Phrases such as 'many climate scientists do not accept' or 'do accept' are not helpful. Look at what the research papers say. They are in the IPCC report. There are, unfortunately, sceptics who express views that cannot often be substantiated by peer-reviewed papers. Galileo, in trouble with the Catholic church for saying the earth rotated around the sun, is reported as saying that 'in questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual'³.

The climate models, and there are now a lot, do show man-made warming. The models are not only meteorological but have a number of different scenarios of the future; the future world population, governance, technological efficiency, etc. These scenarios are being updated and are also complex but as sensible human beings we need to plan for the future. The scenarios predict varying ranges of temperature and carbon emissions. There is no fixed temperature rise for the future. So the ranges are expressed in probabilistic terms. The UK has produced its own climate projections (UKCP09⁴). The data is freely available and for assessing the future under three possible scenarios it is recommended that the user runs the program to produce 3000 years of data for each scenario and time slice to understand the likely outcomes as there are no definite answers or single figures as to the future. See the graph on this page to illustrate the range of future temperature ranges expected for London.

London summer (June, July, August) mean daily maximum temperatures (Met Office + UK Climate Projections)⁵. Low, medium and high refer to the three scenarios.

The scientific method is for rational investigation of hypotheses, some of which are contradictory, which build on proven work. And the majority of papers are showing that climate change is happening and there is a strong possibility that we are responsible. So science does not stand still, but improves, and there are still a number of questions such as the temperature versus carbon dioxide level. Some recent papers have investigated how the gas bubbles in ice core data might move and so adjust timings. But it is early days and the beauty of science is that there will always be new problems to solve and



discoveries to be made.

However, carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that can stay in the atmosphere for many years and influence the temperature of the earth. And carbon dioxide levels are increasing and man is increasing the amount of greenhouse gases emitted.

Climate is what one expects and weather is what one gets. Often trends can only be seen over about 30 years and the recent Met Office data, if taken for a shorter period, does show little increase in temperature but it has a poor correlation compared to the rise in the longer data set. Our poor summers in the UK recently may be due to the oscillation of the jet stream, the Atlantic temperature and the melting arctic ice. More research is required.

Climate change brings in the ethical issues which should be of interest to Unitarians. Each of our individual carbon emissions contributes to the global whole. Perhaps we should determine the limit to carbon emissions and divide it by the world population for each of us to try to achieve. Should we consider the world we leave to our children's children? Or should we be sceptics and just ignore climate change and emit carbon with abandon and let our children's children solve the problems? Will they be able to solve them if the earth has gone beyond the tipping point?

The danger is that we stray from good scientific method at our peril especially if there are too many woolly, unsubstantiated comments as in the *Inquirer* article. After all what scenarios of the future do climate sceptics hold? What papers have they published? Many of them are journalists or members of pressure groups of dubious qualifications.

Geoffrey Levermore is a member of Norcliffe, Styal Chapel and is also a member of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The views expressed in this column are entirely his own.

(Endnotes)

- 1 http://www.cambridge.org/features/earth_environmental/climatechange/wg3.htm
- 2 <http://www.ipcc.ch/>
- 3 Remark attributed in Arago's Eulogy to Galileo Galilei.
- 4 <http://ukclimateprojections.defra.gov.uk/>
- 5 Shamash, M, Mylona, A and Metcalf, G. (2012). Understanding future climate data from UKCP09 for weather data selection: a methodology. CIBSE ASHRAE Technical Symposium, Imperial College, London UK, 18th and 19th April 2012.

Bury's Reunion Sunday filled with memories

By Beryl Allerton and Anne Mills

Reconnecting with the past is a popular pursuit nowadays. Churches have enormous reservoirs of memories – of people, societies and events – but, often, these are stored in archives or kept shut away in cupboards. This year, Bury Unitarian Church, prompted by our minister, the Rev Beryl Allerton, decided to bring those memories to life by holding a Reunion Service, on 9 June.

Accordingly, the congregation set to work, to compile a list of potential guests; considerable detective work was required to find up-to-date details! By April, we had composed a long list, and we advertised our Reunion Service in the local paper, as well as in various Unitarian publications.

The response was amazing! Many guests accepted promptly and enthusiastically, and even those obliged to decline sent messages of support, news and photographs. Our former minister of 34 years, Beryl's husband, John, sang in the choir and read one of the lessons; other former ministers, Jim and Anne McClelland, sent best wishes; and retired ministers, John and Daphne Roberts, attended, accompanied by Daphne's sister, Stella Oates, who used to be one of the caretakers at Bank Street, Bury. One lady came from her home in France especially to be with us.

The day was conceived as an opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones, and reminisce. The worship service, at the start of proceedings, blended the familiar with the new; the choir's introit invited everyone to 'Enter, Rejoice and Come in'. More than 100 people filled the church, singing with gusto and listening to a variety of readings which touched on aspects of church-life: music, friendship, children, and sense of community. The church was beautifully-decorated with flowers to create a cottage-garden atmosphere, and this was reinforced by the choir singing 'In an English Country



Nearly time to start the service – and few seats remaining, except at the front! Photo by Beryl Allerton

Garden'.

At the end of the service, to the strains of 'The Dambusters' March', the congregation assembled in the church garden for a group photograph; the sun certainly shone on the righteous, as it was a glorious day! Our photographer directed operations from the roof – and the result has provided a wonderful record of the day.

A delicious buffet lunch followed, preceded by a toast to friends present and absent. There was conversation, laughter, more photographs, lots of mingling, promises to keep in touch – and yet more conversation. The atmosphere was pleasant and relaxed – what a pity there wasn't twice as much time for chatting!

After lunch, there was plenty of opportunity for further nostalgia; Beryl had mounted a magnificent photo gallery of pictures of church events and church people which spanned many years, and this aroused great interest, not only on the day itself, but afterwards. Roy Turner, a former member, supplied two films from Bury Ciné Society; one of these showed the demolition of the old church and the early years of the three united congregations which formed Bury Unitarian Church in 1974. The other followed 'A Year in the Life' of the church, during 2006. Watching these aroused great comment – as well as a fair amount of hilarity, at times – as people identified themselves, and others!

All in all, this was a highly successful and thoroughly enjoyable occasion, and many of the guests have contacted us, afterwards, to say how pleasant it was. 2014 marks Bury's 40th Anniversary, when we look forward to welcoming this year's guests (and more!) to our celebrations. Our Reunion Service day, though hard work, was worthwhile and, above all, great fun.

Beryl Allerton is minister, and Anne Mills is Chairman of the Bury Congregation. Please visit our website for more photographs of the day: www.bury-unitarian-church.org.uk/



Beryl's 'youngsters' from Sunday School, Uniformed Groups and Youth Club, and memories of trail-games played by the Brownies around the town. Photo by Beryl Allerton

Celebrating Winnie Gordon's valedictory

By Sue Woolley

Winnie Gordon's valedictory service at Unitarian College Manchester (UCM) drew participants and luminaries from across the country.

It was good to see several other people from 'Winnie's congregations' there – three from Kingswood, where she shadowed the Rev Ant Howe in her first year of training, four from Shrewsbury, where she did her pastorate this year, and one from her home congregation of Birmingham. Many of her family members were also present, including her daughter Xaymca.

After greetings from the General Assembly by President Rev. Bill Darlison, we sang the first of three hymns from the Purple Book, 'The Flame of Truth is Kindled'. Then we shared an alternative version of The Lord's Prayer, which had been written by Alison Patrick of Shrewsbury. Alison hadn't realised that Winnie was using it, so it was a good surprise.

Then came our second hymn, 'When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place', which was followed by two very appropriate readings, one about discovering a vocation for ministry, and one about being yourself when you're being a minister. But the highlight of the proceedings was undoubtedly the address, by the Rev Ant Howe. Ant had chosen the title Being Prepared, and used the examples of Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. The example of Moses showed that the 'years in the wilderness' before the call to ministry are never wasted because you can use your prior life experiences in ministry, and that the call to become a minister is a call to leadership – you will be leading people to the Promised Land, like Moses did. John the Baptist also came out of the wilderness, and called on people to repent, because the Kingdom of God was at hand, and Ant explained that ministers are called to have a prophetic voice and to preach a message – to 'comfort the afflicted, and afflict the uncomfortable', as the saying goes. Finally Jesus is first seen in the Temple at the age of 12, and is next seen at the age of 30, so he had to undergo 18 years of preparation for three years of ministry! This showed that you need to take the time for training and ministerial formation – it is not something to rush into headlong. The model for



(l-r) Unitarian College Principal Alex Bradley; Rachel Skelton, college administrator; Anna Jarvis, ministry student; Winnie Gordon and ministry students Ralph Catts, Maria Curtis and Shammy Webster Photo by Nicky Jenkins

ministry includes leading the people, being the prophetic voice, preaching, teaching, healing and trusting that miracles are still possible. He said that ministry is about vocation, and that deep study and preparation are required.

He then spoke to Winnie directly, saying that she had done years of preparation for ministry training; that she had allowed others to discern that calling in her; and that she was now called and trained 'and that calling shines out of you.' He commented that it had been a pleasure to walk that path with her. He reminded her not to neglect her own spiritual life, and to nurture the possible spark of ministry in others, and concluded by saying that she has friends and colleagues that love and respect her.

After this, Winnie gave her own Testimony, looking back over her years in the Unitarian movement, including the welcome, encouragement and support given to her by Unitarian New Meeting at Birmingham; and the love and support she had experienced during her two placements at Kingswood and Shrewsbury. She then described what her training had been like – two years of tears and jubilee, of being knocked down and built up, of caring and sharing, laughing and loving. She commented that it isn't supposed to be easy, and it wasn't.

The training at Luther King House had been a period of formation, of learning and understanding about herself, about living with others, and learning to be in community. It had been an experience that had shaken her up to form her, and then caught her and held her in loving hands. She saw the heart of ordination as a minister as being a process of partnership and assent.

Winnie's hand was then shaken by the Rev Alex Bradley, UCM principal; Rev Bob Wightman, college president; the Rev Ant Howe, guest preacher, Jeff Teagle, chair of the college committee and the Rev Bill Darlison, president of the Unitarian General Assembly, as she was welcomed warmly into Unitarian ministry. Winnie then made a Declaration to which the congregation responded. We finished with a final rousing hymn 'We Laugh, We Cry', followed by a benediction from the Rev Alex Bradley.

The Rev Sue Wooley is minister with the Midland Unitarian Association.

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